

**ADDRESS**

**OF**

**WILLIAM F. JOHNSTON.**

**TO**

**THE PEOPLE OF**

**ARMSTRONG COUNTY,**

**PENNSYLVANIA.**

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# TO THE PEOPLE OF ARMSTRONG COUNTY.

*Fellow Citizens*—An unwarrantable attack is made on me in the last Pennsylvania Reporter, which, reluctant as I feel to engage in a personal controversy, as your representative, I owe to you, not to permit to pass unnoticed. I am assailed, in upwards of a column of misrepresentations, uncandid insinuations, and unfair comment, on the preamble and resolution which I introduced into the House of Representatives on Saturday last, instructing our Senators and requesting our Representatives to vote for the postponement of the Sub-Treasury bill.

Before I proceed to correct these misstatements, I must take occasion to observe, that the article alluded to bears a striking resemblance to the pathetic lament of the same paper, immediately after the allotment of the public printing—and as the Marshal of the Eastern District of this State, (late, if not still owner of that paper) was then here, and took a most zealous part in the transaction referred to, and is now here, quite as busily engaged—the cause of this resemblance will be manifestly apparent. I have nothing to say of the delicacy and propriety of the officers of the general government attempting to drill the legislature, and dictate to its members what course to pursue, in regard to its recommendations; I merely advert to the fact to show how much respect is due to their *disinterested* opinions. One other preliminary observation is necessary. It is said by the Reporter, that for some weeks past, I have been deeply engaged in "*Naval Biography*," and it may be, that the thrilling description, and splendid engraving of the capture of the *Cyane* and *Levant*, have abstracted my attention so much from other matters, as to have obliterated from my mind, the information which has been acquired by the special committee on the currency," of which I am chairman. This insinuation has reference to the recently published biography of Commodore STEWART, one of Pennsylvania's most distinguished and worthy sons.

I have read his biography with great interest, and so have thousands of others—and it is the rapidly extending interest which this biography excites, that has called forth this pitiful insinuation. So far as I know, the Reporter is the only paper in Pennsylvania of standing, on any side in politics, that has not responded to the universal burst of applause, with which the biography of the "conqueror of the *Cyane* and *Levant*," is received. I should be ashamed of myself as a *Pennsylvanian*, if I could sneer at, or attempt to slur over, the fame of a son of Pennsylvania, who has taken more cannon, more prisoners, and more flags from the enemies of his country, than any officer in the army or navy since the revolution. Let the Reporter and its backers assail me for respecting such a man, and I shall thank them, for there is not a patriotic heart in the Keystone state, that does not beat in unison, when the fame of her heroic son is sought to be tarnished by hands who never raised a gun or sword in her defence, while he for forty years has triumphantly borne the flag of his country,

This man, who rose from the humble station of cabin boy, to the head of the American navy; who is one of the last of that illustrious constellation of heroes, who during the Tripolitan, Algerine and last war with Great Britain, covered the flag of their country with imperishable renown, and who by birth, principles and unchangable practice is a uniform, undoubted, and unflinching democrat, cannot be crushed by any official dictation. Nor will he want friends among the patriotic lovers of their country, who rallied so enthusiastically in support of his old bosom friend, General Andrew Jackson.

The Reporter charges me with taking ground against the Sub-Treasury bill, which the federal opposition have not dared to assume, and says that my course of policy is calculated to suit the note shavers and brokers, and continue the present disordered and deranged condition of the currency of the country for at least one year longer. In answering these wholesale charges, all that is necessary will be a simple appeal to the facts, and I venture to say that a more gross and unfounded perversion of any measure never was made by any person who had the least regard for the truth or his own character.

What did the resolution which I had the honor of submitting to the House, propose to do? By a reference to its provisions it will be found, that the preamble sets forth the well known fact, that what is called the 'Sub-Treasury Bill,' is introducing an entire new system in the keeping and disbursement of the public money, and proposes vital and radical changes, which neither the People nor Congress have fully considered or understand. And in order to give them time to deliberate upon, and mature the provisions of this highly important measure, it should be postponed for longer consideration. The resolution connected with the preamble merely instructs our Senators, and requests our members in Congress to vote for this postponement, and in case they fail in obtaining the postponement, then to vote against the bill, or any substitute which might be brought forward. Neither the preamble nor resolution refers to any bill, except this untried experiment of the Sub-treasury. If any bill could be introduced conformable to the course of policy under General Jackson's administration, which would be calculated to remove existing embarrassments, to add security to the safe keeping of the public money, no person but the official editor of the Reporter would suppose that either my resolution or myself was opposed to it. The gratuitous insinuation, that I am in favor of the continuation of the present state of things is totally unfounded in truth.

This is the entire sum and substance of my preamble and resolution, and now let us see whether it is founded upon facts. I am opposed to the sub-treasury bill introduced by Mr Silas Wright, jr. because, as just mentioned, it is the commencement of an entire new course of policy, never before heard of in this Government. It differs essentially from the

"On every sea, Britannia calls her own."



the President, at the extra session in September last, and from the bill then passed the Senate, in pursuance of that recommendation. It increases the number of officers connected with the Treasury department, contrary to the assurance of the President in his late Message, and establishes four **RECEIVERS GENERAL** of *undefined* power—officers unknown to the Constitution, and to all republican government, the examples for which can only be found under the despotisms of the Old World. Because the creation of these officers, with all the specie of the country in their hands, and with a host of dependents at their command, they themselves being the mere instruments of the Executive, is clothing the general government with power which will enable it to crush the state sovereignties and state banks—prostrate the credit and business of the country, and eventually through its unlimited and illimitable sums of treasury notes and treasury drafts, subjugate the American people and render them the slaves of future Executive usurpation.

The provisions of the bill themselves are crude and undigested, and since I offered my resolution the section rendering the Treasury of the United States the grand stock-jobber of the country has been stricken from the bill by a vote of two to one, even Mr Buchanan voting with the majority.—Thus has the Senate already wiped out from the bill, the section which I considered as among the most objectionable and odious.

Other essential and important changes are, I understand, contemplated now by the friends of the bill, before it shall become a law, from which, it is evident that the members of Congress themselves, who have the best opportunity of considering it, are constantly vacillating in their opinions and have already arrived at conclusions partially different from the President's. While such is the case at Washington how can it be expected that the people should be able in so short a time to understand this complicated measure and impart to their representatives the benefit of their counsel and instruction?

It is the bane of our social system to be constantly legislating upon emergencies that will regulate themselves if only let alone. That the "world is governed too much," is a maxim admitted by every intelligent republican, and yet the friends of the Sub-treasury system are springing upon Congress their crude, and undigested plans, as if the public interests were not at all involved in the result. If there ever was a time when caution and grave deliberation were required, that time is the present. The national disease is too deep seated and universal to be cured by the quack nostrums that can be compounded in a day. A measure in which all the people are concerned, should not be adopted until they have all had full time to examine it.

In Pennsylvania especially, should hasty action on this subject be most emphatically deprecated. It is a cardinal principle of democracy here that the power and patronage of all governments should be as circumscribed as possible. We have now a Convention sitting to carry out this very principle in practice—to incorporate it in the Constitution of the State. But of what avail is it to limit the puny power of the Governor of a state when you throw by whole-sale, all the specie of the country, with absolute power of control over its

business, its banks and its prosperity, into the hands of the Executive of the general government! Let this union between the purse and the sword be once perfected, and the days of this republic are numbered. It will not require the genius and boldness of a Cæsar to grasp the sceptre of power. Some supple demagogue and his receivers general, will overturn in one hour, our free institutions, which required from Washington and his compatriots of the revolution, years of toil and suffering to establish, and from their descendants, Jackson, Stewart, Decatur, Perry and others, similar toils and sufferings to maintain.

These were the leading considerations that induced me to offer the preamble and resolution which have found so little favor with the *disinterested* official editor of the Reporter. But the Reporter asserts that my resolution is running counter to the democracy of Pennsylvania and of the Union. Such an assertion should not have been made without some proof. Who is the democracy? And when has it spoken in favor of the sub-treasury?

I deny that the sub-treasury scheme is of democratic origin, or that it has ever received the approbation of the democratic party. On the contrary it is a *federal* measure first brought forward in 1834 by Mr. Gordon and Mr. Leigh of Virginia, two of the leading federalists of Congress at that time, and it was then denounced by Gen. Jackson and all his friends in and out of Congress, in the strongest terms of condemnation. The Globe, at that time the official organ of President Jackson's administration, on the 20th of November 1834, but little more than three years ago, asserted that the President himself was opposed to the project, and condemned it in the following pointed language:

"THE PROPOSITION IS DISORGANIZING AND REVOLUTIONARY, SUBVERSIVE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OUR GOVERNMENT, AND OF ITS ENTIRE PRACTICE, FROM 1789 DOWN TO THIS DAY."

"It is as palpable as the sun, that the effect of the scheme would be to bring the public treasure MUCH NEARER the actual 'custody and control of the President,' than it is now, and EXPOSE IT TO BE PLUNDERED BY A HUNDRED HANDS, where one cannot now reach it."—Globe, Nov. 20, 1834.

"What then? why, the public moneys, from the time of their receipt to the time of their disbursement, amounting, as they often do, to ten or twelve millions of dollars, must remain in the hands of individuals appointed by the President, and removable at his will! And this comes from a man who has leagued with scores of others to denounce the president as an usurper, and contemner of the constitution and laws, because he claimed for the executive the custody of the public money, in a much more limited sense! He has never claimed that it should be retained in the actual keeping of executive officers, but only that it must be at their credit, and within their control, under such restrictions as congress may impose in some BANK OR BANKS, or other places of deposit. But Mr Leigh thinks that, according to the true spirit of the constitution, it ought to be kept in their pockets, chests or vaults, where they can approach it every day, and use it without the checks of warrants drawn, countersigned,



registered, and recorded, and passing through many hands, without which not a dollar can now be touched by any public officer not even the President himself? *We do not agree with Mr Leigh in the opinion, that it was the intention of the constitution to leave with the executive this most dangerous control over the public money.* If we did, not having the *flexible political conscience* [!] of this wise senator, we should be obliged to insist that on this subject, also, the constitution should be restored to its original meaning, and the *unauthorised constructions* which have been grafted upon it, lopped off. But Mr Leigh feels himself under no such necessity. Thus does he excuse himself for abandoning his reading of the constitution on this point, viz:

"At the same time, *I have no expectation that this principle will ever be acted on to its full extent.* THE FRIENDS OF THE STATE BANKS, the friends of a National Bank, and the supporters of the Executive claims to power will all combine against it; and the nation, most probably, will never agree, that the immense sums yearly paid in for revenue, shall, between the time of collection and the time of disbursement, be wholly unemployed and unproductive."

"If Mr Leigh has reference to the *friends of President Jackson*, when he speaks of the supporters of the Executive claims to power," he may be assured that they will, to a man, be united against any such monstrous accumulation of power over the public money which such a plan would throw into the hands of the Executive. And we venture to allege, that HAD SUCH A SUGGESTION COME FROM GEN. JACKSON, *it would have been sung through the old dominion* with the reiterated falsehoods about the proclamation and the protest, as conclusive proof of all the aspirations which have been charged to the Hero of Orleans! "SEE, (they would say, (HERE HE WISHES TO PUT THE PUBLIC MONEY DIRECTLY INTO THE PALMS OF HIS FRIENDS AND PARTIZANS, INSTEAD OF KEEPING IT ON DEPOSIT IN BANKS, WHENCE IT CANNOT BE DRAWN FOR OTHER THAN PUBLIC PURPOSES, WITHOUT CERTAIN DETECTION." In such a case, we should feel that the people had just cause for ALARM, and ought to give their most watchful attention to such an effort to ENLARGE EXECUTIVE POWER, AND PUT IN ITS HANDS THE MEANS OF CORRUPTION. And are these the principles upon which Mr Leigh expects to return to the senate from *land of Jefferson!*"

"Mr Leigh knows that the PRESIDENT HIMSELF IS OPPOSED TO THE PROJECT which he ascribes to his supporters, and that his friends in Washington, whether of the Cabinet or not, heartily concur with him in the course of policy it is expedient to pursue."—Globe, Sept. 30, 1834.

Let any candid democrat read the above and say whether stronger terms of denunciation could have been applied to the sub-treasury scheme. It is true, in the very last Globe that has reached Harrisburg, there is a quibbling attempt made to explain away this direct and emphatic condemnation. But all that any one needs, is to read what they said then and what they say now, to see them condemned out of their own mouths.

Now the question recurs—was General Jackson a democrat? Did the democratic party support him? Did the Globe at that time speak the sentiments of the democratic party? If these

things be so, then is the sub-treasury bill any thing but a democratic measure. It lies condemned by the democratic party, along side of the alien and sedition laws, and the other strong measures of federal usurpation, for consolidating the state governments, under one great, overshadowing central power.

The official editor of the Reporter will answer, however, that the Globe has eaten up its own words, and denounces as federalists those who oppose this measure now, as lustily as it did those who brought it forward and supported it in 1834. He will answer that the administration stands pledged to carry out Gen. Jackson's measures of policy, has adopted this as its leading object, although it was discarded and beaten down by Gen. Jackson and the democratic party.

Suppose the Globe has changed, and the administration has abandoned the solid republican ground on which Gen. Jackson's administration stood? Does that change the principle of the measure itself? Or does it afford the slightest reason why a consistent and independent minded man who opposed this measure in 1834, should, wheel to the right about at a drill sergeant's command and support it now? Is the Democratic Party of Pennsylvania, a band of Swiss mercenaries? Have they no minds or judgment of their own? Are they willing servilely to obey the command of executive minions and blindly aid in rearing an uncontrollable central power? Will they creep and cringe like grovelling slaves at the foot stool of a Turkish tyrant; denounce a measure to day and cry out in support of it tomorrow? Let those whom the partial bounty of the General Government feeds, do so, but the high minded, intelligent democracy of Pennsylvania disdain to pass under the debasing yoke.

The Reporter states that I am opposed to any action by Congress on the subject of the currency, and that I am in favor of leaving it in its present condition, for at least one year more. This statement is not only untrue, but is a dishonorable perversion of the concluding clause of the resolution offered. So far from this being the fact, I am as anxious as any man in the United States, to see these difficulties settled and the prosperity of the country once more restored. I am in favor of precisely the same measures that were established by President Jackson's administration in 1833 and 1834, with some salutary modifications. The bill introduced as a substitute for Mr Wright's bill, by Mr. Rives, with some alterations, meets my approbation, and if adopted, would carry out strictly and rationally, the measures began by Gen. Jackson's administration in reference to this matter. This is the great substitute for a National Bank, which was adopted by the democratic party in 1834, and, which will now fully meet the expectations of every intelligent democrat. It is not true, as stated by the Reporter, that this system has failed. Great and uncontrollable causes have produced a crisis which has paralyzed all the business operations of the country, and among the rest, all the banking institutions. This is the first time that so wide spread a disaster has occurred in this nation, and it never can occur again until we have another National Bank with the same train of causes to produce it. The experiment has never been fairly tried, except for two or three years, during which time, we have the highest testimony in its favor. Hear what President Jack-



son, Mr. Woodbury, the Secretary of the Treasury, and Mr. Wright, the author of the present bill, themselves all admit upon the subject:

"The country will sustain the Executive arm of the government in the experiment now making to substitute the *State Institutions* for the Bank of the United States."—Mr. Wright, Jan. 1834.

"The State Banks are found fully adequate to the performance of all services which were required by the Bank of the United States, quite as promptly and with the *same cheapness*."—Gen. Jackson's Message of 1834.

"By the use of the *State Banks*, which do not derive their charters from the general government, and are not controlled by its authority, it is ascertained that the moneys of the United States can be collected and disbursed without loss or inconvenience, and that all the wants of the community, in relation to exchange and currency, are supplied as well as they ever have been before."—Message of Dec. 1835.

"It should be constantly recollected that the owners and managers of banks, when properly regulated by legislative provisions in their charters, are, like other individuals, interested to transact business securely; are desirous of making and not losing money; and that these circumstances, with the preference in case of failure belonging to depositors and holders of their bills over the stockholders, united with the security, if not priority, given to the government, render them, in point of safety, generally MUCH SUPERIOR TO INDIVIDUAL AGENTS OF THE UNITED STATES."—Mr. Woodbury's Report, 1834.

Will any rational and honest man pretend to say that a system which has operated in the manner this is conceded to have done, should be abandoned for the dangerous experiment of the Sub-Treasury? Can any man who dispassionately examines the subject, deny that this is the only means of preventing the establishment of another National Bank? What is the Sub-Treasury itself, but a great Bank of the United States, based, it is true, upon most of the gold and silver which it is contemplated shall be drained from all other sections of the country, into the city of New York?

The Reporter also complains that I have even "out Heroded Herod," by desiring a postponement of the action of Congress on this subject, and quotes Mr. Webster for authority that something must be done in relation to the monetary concerns of the country, and alleges, that some action is asked by the whole community. I refer the Editor to the Message of the President to the Extra Session, in which he most positively asserts that the General Government has nothing to do with the currency, &c.

"I cannot doubt that on this, as on all similar occasions, the federal government will find its agency most conducive to the security and happiness of the people, when limited to the exercise of its conceded powers. In never assuming, even for a well meant object, such powers as were not designed to be conferred upon it, we shall, in reality, do most for the general welfare. To avoid every unnecessary interference with the pursuits of the citizen, will result in more benefit than to adopt measures which could only assist limited interests, and are eagerly, but perhaps naturally, sought for, under the pressure of temporary circumstances. If, therefore, I refrain from

suggesting to Congress any specific plan for regulating the exchanges of the country, relieving mercantile embarrassments, or interfering with the ordinary operations of foreign or domestic commerce, it is from a conviction that such measures are not within the constitutional province of the general government, and that their adoption would not promote the real and permanent welfare of those they might be designed to aid.

The difficulties and distresses of the times, though unquestionably great, are limited in their extent, and cannot be regarded as affecting the permanent prosperity of the nation."

I am reminded by the Reporter, that the sub-treasury to a certain extent, is now in operation. Even as it is, without Receivers General and a distinct organization, the Treasury of the United States is to all practical purposes a National Bank. It has \$10,000,000 of notes in circulation, which pass from hand to hand as the notes of a bank, and as the business of the country increases, its drafts and checks given to the creditors of the government, will be augmented many millions more, forming a similar circulation. Here then we have a vast National Bank in every essential but the name, and adopt the sub treasury bill, your Receivers of General become the cashiers of four separate branches of this National Bank, under the presidency and direction of the President of the United States.

It is surprising to me that a measure which leads to such results and clothes men, already possessing vast political power, with all the powers of a National Bank, should be thought less dangerous than a corporation of private individuals, possessing no political power at all. This fact is undeniable, and let me see the man, who after this exposition, can support the sub treasury bill, and because I oppose it denounce me for favoring the establishment of a National Bank. I was opposed to a National Bank in 1833 and '34. I am opposed to it still, and I leave the jewel of consistency to be claimed by those who, (to use the language of a distinguished ex President,)

"If they cannot alter things

"—they'll change their names, sir."

In conclusion, I have but a few words to say. I did not offer the resolution to which exception has been taken, until after resolutions instructing our senators to vote in favor of the sub-treasury bill had been introduced, and until that bill was taken up by the senate. I considered that the support of such a measure would involve a gross inconsistency in the democratic party. I thought it would be a wanton departure from the principles of President Jackson's administration, and in surveying the democratic party I saw that it would lead to discord, division and defeat. Many distinguished democrats in Pennsylvania, in New York and in Virginia, with Mr. Rives and the veneran editor of the Richmond Enquirer at their head, were opposed to this innovation upon the established policy of the government.

And every candid democrat will readily admit that division, even to the smallest extent, is the forerunner of defeat in Pennsylvania. Already are the opposition in possession of the power of the government. Its organized corps of retainers are planted in every town of the State. We have no longer the irresistible influence of Gen. Jackson to keep us united and to inspire the democratic party



with confidence. The two last elections are solemn affirmations of the truth of our condition—they show impressively that we have no strength to lose without yielding hope along with it. I offered the preamble and resolution for the postponement of the sub-treasury bill, with a view, among other reasons, to unite and conciliate, if possible, every member of the democratic party—to hold the question in suspense, not only for reflection, but that its friends and opponents might unite against the common foe in the great struggle that awaits us at the ensuing most important election. I am perfectly willing to submit it to the democracy of Pennsylvania to say, whether they who pursue a bigotted and proscriptive course towards the members of the same party, who happen to differ on particular questions, are the sincere friends of the integrity and success of the party, or whether they are not rather its worst enemies, be they the commissioned or the non commissioned officers of the national government. I have made this statement thus early to prevent erroneous impressions going to your ears—and to

place in a proper point of view my conduct in relation to this interesting subject.

I have done with the matter, and whether sustained or otherwise, I feel conscious of having discharged a great public duty, without "fear, favor or affection."

Being persuaded that the adoption of the sub-treasury bill would eventuate in the establishment of a splendid consolidated central government, utterly at variance with the well settled policy of the democracy of the Union, from this and other considerations before referred to, I would have been unworthy to be your representative, had I permitted the measure to have passed without an attempt to arrest its course.

Your fellow-citizen,

WM. F. JOHNSTON.

P. S. All those democratic papers who copy the views of the Reporter, are respectfully requested to give this an insertion.

Harrisburg, Feb. 6, 1838.

